

Nourish to Flourish

Nourish to Flourish brings together practitioners' voices and creative practices, and appreciative reviews of resources that support strengths-based approaches to human interactions.

Appreciative Resources



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The Systems Thinker

<https://thesystemsthinker.com/>

Systems thinking perspective requires curiosity, clarity, compassion, choice, and courage. This approach includes the willingness to see a situation more fully, to recognize that we are interrelated, to acknowledge that there are often multiple interventions to a problem, and to champion interventions that may not be popular.

Michael Goodman in [Systems Thinking: What, why, when, where, and how?](#)

THE SYSTEMS
THINKER™

T [hesystemsthinker.com](https://thesystemsthinker.com) is an archive of published articles aimed at “catalyzing effective change by expanding the use of systems approaches”. The website was launched in the early 1980s thanks to Daniel Kim, organizational consultant, facilitator, teacher, public speaker and contributor to almost 100 articles on the site, and to Colleen Lannon, co-founder of the original publisher, Pegasus Communications. In 2013, The Systems Thinker was acquired by Ebay founder and philanthropist Pierre Omidyar’s The Omidyar Group.

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The site is a repository of hundreds of free articles, case studies, how-to guides, pocket guides, tools (causal loop diagrams, archetypes, management flight simulator, the iceberg framework and more) and videos/webinars. These can be searched by topic (archetypes, fundamentals, leadership, management, managing conflict, organizational learning, personal mastery, public policy, scenario planning, strategy, sustainability and system dynamics almost all show over 100 results); by sector (business, education, government, healthcare and social change); by type; or by author.

Among contributors are internationally acclaimed organizational learning and complex system change gurus like David Peter Stroh, Peter Senge, Gene Bellinger and Michael Goodman. Dozens more authors are listed with handy short bios. Contact information or links to their other work would be a plus.

From technical to inspirational

The content can be technical, like [A pocket guide to using the archetypes](#), by Daniel Kim and Colleen Lannon or inspirational – [How can we solve our toughest problems peacefully](#), by Adam Kahane – and addresses what feel like current, relevant topics. None of the articles are dated. The articles are presented on a clean, modern, advertisement-free platform that makes it appealing to browse and easy to share with quick links to social media, print and email on each page, as well as the option to bookmark articles of interest.

I wanted to do justice to the depth and breadth of the topic.

This review was hard for me to write. For a long time, I couldn't figure out why. I wanted to do justice to the depth and breadth of the topic, the articles and the authors that make up thesystemsthinker.com. Yet I felt ill-equipped to tackle this big task. There was something else, some deeper block that prevented me from capturing the essence of it. Finally, in a conversation with my coach, it became clear, in unexpected ways, and with unexpected tears.

All along, I was trying to find a way to explain that systems thinking is a better approach to problem-solving than linear thinking. I wanted the reader to understand that this methodology and mindset could be used on topics ranging from [service quality excellence](#), to [mindfulness](#), to [climate change](#) or conflicts like the one between [Israeli and Palestinian](#).

A miracle solution?

In other words, I wanted to provide a miracle solution to some of the world's toughest issues. Not surprisingly, it was overwhelming. That's when the tears

Most problems don't have a simple solution.

came. I became aware of my own discomfort and fears when faced with the proposition that most problems don't have a simple solution, that no matter how much we wish to believe in simple laws of cause and effect, it is not the most effective way to make progress.

The unexpected consequences of linear thinking

In fact, systems thinking suggests that such a linear view can be harmful. In their article [Acting and Thinking Systematically](#), David Peter Stroh and Kathleen Zurcher give the example of starvation and call our attention to the unintended long term impact of food donations as they drive local food prices down and indirectly hinder local agricultural development. They offer four key areas in which a systemic approach surpasses a linear one:

One must look at the interdependencies between the elements of a system.

- There are more than symptoms and direct causes. One must look at the interdependencies between the elements of a system, at the relationships that are circular, indirect and non-obvious.
- Without such analysis, quick fixes only create problems in the long term.
- Well-intentioned but isolated groups contribute to the very problem they are trying to solve unless they work together, like distributing food aid without collaborating with local food producers.
- Aristotle said “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts”, and indeed, improving the relationship between parts, or local initiatives, or people, yields a greater positive impact on the system as a whole than improving each of these separately.

Systems thinking and AI: Stakeholders, diversity and interconnectedness

Systems thinking mirrors the Wholeness principle of Appreciative Inquiry.

Systems thinking mirrors the Wholeness principle of Appreciative Inquiry in that it invites many stakeholders into the conversation, it finds value in diversity of views, it reminds us that we are interconnected, and it shows that embracing the system generates creativity, capacity and generativity where everyone flourishes.

“Nothing good in the world happens until people get together, talk, understand one another's perspectives and assumptions, and work together toward a

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compelling goal or a vision,” says David Berdish in [Learning and leading through the badlands](#).

All in all, this resource is valuable because its content and contributors share a common mission: they call for curiosity, for asking new types of questions to unveil diverse perspectives; they recognize that there is not one perfect solution but many stories embedded in our teams, organizations, societies and global networks; they remind us that it is ultimately about people and relationships.

So rather than offering an answer, I hope that thesystemsthinker.com can, as it did for me, give you more courage to look complexity in the eye, nurture compassion for your sense of being overwhelmed, and fuel your hope with the belief that our small, individual actions do indeed make the whole system shift, just like an invisible breeze moves a baby's mobile above the crib in sometimes significant and beautiful ways.

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